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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

26 August 1955

STAFF MEMORANDUM NO. 57-55

SUBJECT: Sophistication of NIE's

1. While my short tenure in O/NE and intelligence (as well as government) does not perhaps warrant this sort of thing, I have presumed to set down a few thoughts regarding the substantive topics considered in NIE's. I am prompted by the death of Thomas Mann, who, although he little concerned himself (as Marquis Childs has reminded us) with the outward manifestations of this century of war and revolution, was profoundly aware of the deeper currents underlying the surface of domestic and international affairs.

2. It seems to me that while discussion of political, economic, military and foreign policy matters is basic, and is well handled in NIE's, estimates would gain in depth of analysis if they likewise included consideration of so-called "imponderable" factors which are essential to a mature understanding of the world in which we live. Cultural and psychological influences, although less apparent, are as important as the more obvious topics now considered in estimates. Contemporary France cannot be understood unless its malaise is examined in terms of personal and social irresponsibility, the ideological cleavages stemming from the French Revolution, the disastrous shock of two World Wars, and national psychosis based upon her Great Power tradition. German democracy today, as in the Twenties and early Thirties, stands in peril, not only when Adenauer goes or a depression occurs, or if reunification is long delayed, but is also threatened by a moral vacuum and social dislocation, by the cultural aberrations of the times, and by the political immaturity of the people. Hitler did not rise to power solely because of his diabolical genius, democratic Weimar's faults, the Great Depression, and the industrialists' attitude. The conflict between the Soviet Union and the West is misunderstood if the cultural separation of Modern Russia from Europe, the historical conflict between Orthodox Russia and the Judaic-Christian West, and Russia's Messianic tradition are neglected. And so forth.

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3. I realize several objections to this line of thought.

a. Policymakers concerned with practical decisions about economic loans, military preparedness, etc., don't give a hoot about these imprecise factors. -- However, they should -- and is not intelligence an educational apparatus within government? No amount of money and guns will deter weakness or collapse if a nation suffers from chronic ailments such as those of France, although, I hasten to add, this does not mean that France shouldn't receive aid. Six million dollars will not be as effectively utilized in Guatemala as in the UK. Neutralist nations are more likely to be swayed by appreciation of their cultural traditions and national feelings and character than by economic aid. NIE's now all read alike, with little consideration of national and area peculiarities other than those which are political and economic in nature.

b. Scholarly Mumbo Jumbo is bad enough in the ivory towers and should be isolated there without confusing practical minded policymakers. -- Discussion of these factors need not be in gobbledygook, but can and should be dealt with in language as clear as that used in NIE's at the present time. Obscurantism need not accompany discussion of imponderables.

c. Discussion of these underlying factors will only involve the intelligence community in a wrangle over the philosophic issues which now divide the Western world. -- Might not be a bad thing for the persons involved, but at any rate, the pluralist West is not so cleft by these disputes that a generally accepted manner of thought does not exist, at least outside the academic and literary worlds.

d. The NIS sections on cultural and sociological affairs contain the materials suggested and estimates should not duplicate that source. -- However, other subjects discussed in country estimates are also found in basic as well as in current intelligence documents. In any event, NIE's should include all materials relevant to the policymaker's problems, whether or not certain topics are covered elsewhere. Moreover, it can hardly be assumed that consumers are familiar with cultural background, either through the medium of the NIS or other sources.

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4. To sum up, practical political decisions in world as well as domestic affairs that are based solely on such things as economic statistics, military forces, political parties, and the like, are inadequately founded. I realize this is a pragmatic country, but that is no reason for neglecting the education of responsible policy-makers. Discussion of imponderables need not be either obscure or lengthy, is not irrelevant, and therefore should be included in estimative intelligence. While I feel certain of the line of thought in these remarks, I am ready to be put in my place if there are reasons or practical obstacles why this suggestion is not applicable to NIE's. (Obviously, such a discussion would not be appropriate for all NIE's, but only the basic country estimates.)

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